



ATTENDANCE JUSTIFICATION GUIDE

Illinois Circularity Conference 2026

Advancing Sustainable Materials Management in Illinois

August 19–20, 2026

**EVEN Hotel & Tinley Park Convention Center
Tinley Park, Illinois**

Presented by The Battery Network



PURPOSE OF THIS PACKET



Why this Packet Matter?

Use this packet to help a supervisor, department head, board, purchasing officer, or budget approver understand why attending the Illinois Circularity Conference is a practical investment in your organization's work — not a discretionary trip.

Customize the bracketed fields, attach the budget worksheet, and submit the approval email or one-page memo with the agenda.

Dates
August 19–20, 2026

Convention Center
*EVEN Hotel & Tinley Park Convention Center,
 Tinley Park, IL*

Host
Illinois Recycling Foundation • SWANA Illinois

Presented by:
The Battery Network (Title Sponsor)
Hotel Discount Available
 Use promo code **IRF** when booking your hotel room to receive the conference rate.

Format: Two days of plenaries, concurrent breakouts, exhibit-hall networking, and an optional field trip

Tracks: Education / Diversion • Industry Insights

Core themes: Materials management, recycling systems, circular economy, organics, batteries, textiles, packaging, producer responsibility, public education

Register: illinoisrecycles.org/Events

Full agenda: illinoiscircularityconference.org/agenda

1. Executive Justification

I am requesting approval to attend the 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference, August 19–20, 2026, in Tinley Park, Illinois. This conference is directly relevant to our work because it brings together the people responsible for Illinois recycling, solid waste, materials management, sustainability, public education, compliance, product stewardship, collection, processing, and end markets.

The value of attending is not limited to professional development. The conference provides timely operational intelligence, peer benchmarking, access to state and regional decision-makers, and practical examples that can be applied to our programs, contracts, outreach, budgets, and planning. The agenda includes statewide recycling needs-assessment findings, battery stewardship, textiles, organics, packaging, producer responsibility, facility and program case studies, and public-facing recycling education.

Approval is requested for registration, travel, lodging if needed, and related expenses. I will provide a written post-conference summary, share useful contacts and resources, and identify at least three concrete follow-up actions that can improve our organization's work.

Bottom line Attendance will help us make better decisions, avoid duplicative work, improve resident and customer education, strengthen partnerships, and prepare for changes affecting recycling and circular-economy programs in Illinois.

2. *Why This Conference Matters Now*

Illinois is entering a transformative period in sustainable materials management. This is the central convening point for that transition — built around Illinois conditions, agencies, markets, and implementation realities rather than generic sustainability theory.

- **Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment.** New data from Eunomia Research & Consulting will shape infrastructure and education investments for the next decade.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).** Illinois is implementing and expanding producer responsibility for batteries, electronics, and potentially packaging — local governments and industry need clarity on operational impacts.
- **Battery stewardship.** The Illinois Portable Battery Act and The Battery Network program require coordinated collection, education, and safe handling statewide.
- **Circular-economy opportunities.** Organics diversion, textile recycling, packaging innovation, and furniture reuse represent growing economic and environmental opportunities.
- **Workforce development.** The next generation of practitioners, highlighted in the Young Professionals plenary, is essential to long-term success.

Better use of public and organizational funds Learning from tested programs reduces trial-and-error costs and improves the effectiveness of recycling and diversion investments. One well-applied idea typically returns many times the cost of attendance.

3. Specific Organizational Benefits

How common challenges map to conference value and expected return:

Need / Challenge	Conference Value	Expected Return
Recycling contamination and resident confusion	Education, outreach, Recycle Coach-style tools, peer examples	Clearer messaging, fewer avoidable errors, improved participation
Changing battery and electronics responsibilities	Battery and product stewardship sessions	Improved safety protocols, program planning, public guidance
Limited staff capacity	Proven models and contacts from other communities	Faster implementation using tested approaches
Organics, food scraps, institutional waste	Case studies on food waste, composting, anaerobic digestion, large-scale organics	Better diversion planning and vendor evaluation
Textiles, specialty, and hard-to-recycle items	Sessions and optional field trip on real material pathways	More realistic collection decisions and resident education
Board, council, or leadership questions	Current data and statewide needs-assessment findings	More defensible recommendations and budget requests

4. Full Agenda

Two days of plenaries, concurrent breakouts across two tracks — Education / Diversion and Industry Insights — and an optional Thursday-afternoon field trip. Agenda is preliminary and updated as confirmations come in.

Day 1 — Wednesday, August 19, 2026

8:00–9:00 AM	Registration, Coffee & Exhibit Hall Opens
9:00–9:15 AM	Welcome from The Battery Network & Host Organizations
9:15–10:00 AM	Opening Keynote — Federal & State Leadership A view from Region 5 and Springfield. <i>Anne Vogel, Regional Administrator — U.S. EPA Region 5 • James Jennings, Director — Illinois EPA</i>
10:00–10:50 AM	Morning Plenary — Illinois Statewide Needs Assessment Packaging, paper & waste characterization, and the data shaping Illinois' next decade. Eunomia Research & Consulting
10:50–11:30 AM	Networking Break — Exhibit Hall Open
11:30 –12:30 PM	<p>Breakout Slot 1</p> <p>Education / Diversion • Salon A</p> <p>Green Era: A Working Model of the Circular Economy <i>Susannah Sun, Green Era</i></p> <p>Source-Separated Organics Collection in Lake Forest <i>Tommy Vaughan, WasteNot</i></p> <p>Reducing Institutional Food Waste at County Facilities <i>Zach Samaras, ISTC — with Cook County Health</i></p> <p>Industry Insights • Salon B</p> <p>From Chicagoland to Global Markets: The Real Path of Recycled Textiles <i>Justin Woycke, Chicago Textile Recycling • Merleanne Hiatt Rampale, SWALCO • additional voices TBC</i></p>

Day 1 — Wednesday, August 19, 2026

12:30–1:45 PM	Lunch — Networking & Table Discussions
1:45–2:45 PM	<p>Breakout Slot 2 Education / Diversion · Salon A Feed the Cart: Partner Lightning Round <i>Speakers being confirmed</i> City of Chicago Recycle Coach Implementation Carter O'Brien, City of Chicago</p> <p>Industry Insights · Salon B What Really Happens to Batteries After Collection? <i>Marta Keane, The Battery Network (IL program) · Dan Johnson, The Battery Network (downstream & safety)</i></p>
2:45–3:45 PM	<p>Breakout Slot 3 Education / Diversion · Salon A Packaging in Circulation <i>Aleksandra Plewa, EcoShip NFP</i></p> <p>PFAS-Free, Compostable Foodware in Chicagoland Food Businesses <i>Cassie Carroll, IL Green Business Program</i></p> <p>Industry Insights · Salon B Evolving Paper Supply & Demands <i>George Ward Jr., Midwest Paper Retriever</i></p>
3:45–4:15 PM	Afternoon Break — Exhibit Hall Open

Day 1 — Wednesday, August 19, 2026

4:15–5:15 PM	<p>Breakout Slot 4 Education / Diversion · Salon A Recycling 2.0: DIY Approaches to Resource Capture & Reuse <i>Carolee Kokola, Bubbly Dynamics / The Plant</i></p> <p>Results from a Circular Economy Startup Simulator <i>Anne-Marie Hanson, University of Illinois Springfield</i></p> <p>Industry Insights · Salon B Producer Responsibility Comes to Illinois: Batteries, Electronics, Packaging & What Comes Next <i>Panel — Roxane Peggs, The Battery Network (moderator) • Christina Seibert, SWANA Illinois • policy voice TBC</i></p>
5:30–6:30 PM	Networking Happy Hour with Exhibitors
6:30–7:30 PM	Dinner
8:00–9:30 PM	Post-Dinner Networking — Casino Night & DJ

Day 2 — Thursday, August 20, 2026

8:00–9:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00–10:00 AM	<p>Breakout Slot</p> <p>Education / Diversion · Salon A Specialty Recycling as Landfill Diversion in Downstate Thrift Stores <i>Nathan Montgomery, Salt & Light • Betsy Ruckman, ISTC</i></p> <p>Donate Used Furniture: Sustainability & Ending Furniture Poverty <i>Mary Novak, Chicago Furniture Bank</i></p> <p>Industry Insights · Salon B Food Scraps Program Update: Large-Scale Organics in Practice <i>Speakers being confirmed</i></p>
10:00–11:00 AM	<p>Closing Plenary — SWANA Young Professionals Voices from the next generation of Illinois solid-waste and circular-economy practitioners. <i>Moderator: Shea Walter, SWANCC • Panelists: Betsy Ruckman, Shirley Kalapala, Briana Moore, Spencer LaBelle, Maximilian Ehret, Myles Barnes</i></p>
11:00 AM–12:00 PM	<p>Closing Program — Awards, Acknowledgments & ICC 2027 Preview Recognition of award recipients and thanks to sponsors, speakers, and attendees. Adjourns at noon.</p>

Optional Thursday-afternoon field trip — Three-Stop Circular Economy Tour Boarding 12:00–12:30 PM, depart 12:30, return ~3:30–4:00. Boxed lunch on board; capacity 50. Stops: the CHaRM Center (hard-to-recycle materials), Green Era (anaerobic digestion & composting), and PCs for People (electronics refurbishment & digital equity).

Live agenda with full speaker bios: illinoiscircularityconference.org/agenda. Preliminary and subject to change.

5. Role-Based Justification Language

Pick the framing that matches your audience and tie it to a job description, department goal, strategic or sustainability plan, grant, compliance obligation, or board priority.

For this audience	Use this justification
Municipality / county / public agency	Prepare for changing stewardship requirements, improve resident education, evaluate diversion programs, and learn from peers facing the same operational constraints.
Hauler, processor, recycler, MRF, or compost operator	Direct access to public-sector partners, market discussions, policy trends, and end-user concerns affecting collection, processing, safety, contamination, and customer communication.
Corporate sustainability or facilities team	Practical examples for waste prevention, food-waste reduction, reuse, recycling education, procurement, reporting, and vendor evaluation.
School, university, hospital, or institution	Connect institutional waste-reduction goals with real case studies on food waste, specialty recycling, education, and operational systems.
Nonprofit or community organization	Partnership opportunities, program models, grant-relevant ideas, and clearer insight into the statewide circularity network.
Elected official, board member, or executive	Current, Illinois-specific context for budget, policy, infrastructure, education, and compliance decisions.

6. Budget Worksheet

Customize the numbers before submitting. If final registration or hotel costs are not yet confirmed, use estimates and label them as such.

Expense Item	Est. Cost	Basis / Notes	Approved?
Conference registration	\$ _____	Full / single day; member or non-member rate	
Lodging	\$ _____	____ nights × \$____ per night, plus taxes/fees	
Mileage / travel	\$ _____	Mileage, train, rental car, parking, or other	
Meals not included	\$ _____	Only meals not covered by registration	
Optional field trip	\$ _____	Include only if separately charged and relevant	
Other	\$ _____	Specify: _____	
Total Requested			

A note on value Costs can be controlled by registering early, using member rates if eligible, sharing lodging or travel, and limiting reimbursable expenses to approved items. Compared with national conferences requiring airfare and multiple nights' lodging, ICC delivers Illinois-specific content at a fraction of the total cost.

7. Accountability Plan After Attendance

To make the investment measurable, within 10 business days after the conference I will:

1. Provide a one-page summary of key takeaways, contacts, and recommended next steps.
2. Share session notes and useful resources with relevant staff or leadership.
3. Identify at least three practical ideas to evaluate for implementation, policy improvement, vendor discussion, grant development, public education, or program design.
4. Recommend whether to pursue follow-up meetings with any speaker, sponsor, agency representative, peer organization, hauler, recycler, processor, compost operator, or service provider.
5. Document any budget, compliance, safety, outreach, or operational implications for the next planning cycle.

8. Approval Email Template

Replace the bracketed items with your own details.

Subject: Approval Request — 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference (Aug 19–20, Tinley Park)

Hi [Name],

I am requesting approval to attend the 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference on August 19–20, 2026, at the EVEN Hotel & Tinley Park Convention Center in Tinley Park.

This conference is directly relevant to our work because it focuses on Illinois-specific recycling, solid waste, circular economy, materials management, public education, product stewardship, organics, textiles, batteries, packaging, and implementation issues. The agenda includes federal and state leadership, the Illinois statewide needs assessment, battery stewardship, producer responsibility, organics diversion, specialty recycling, and practical case studies from across Illinois.

I expect to bring back information to help us improve [resident/customer education], [contamination reduction], [program planning], [compliance readiness], and [budget recommendations]. I will provide a written summary afterward with takeaways, contacts, and recommended next steps.

Estimated cost: Registration [\$___] • Lodging [\$___] • Travel/parking [\$___] • Meals/other [\$___] • Total requested [\$___]

Please let me know if you approve this request or need any additional information. I believe this is a strong investment because the conference is focused on the exact statewide issues and operational decisions we are working through now.

Thank you,

[Name]

9. One-Page Memo Template

To: [Supervisor / Department Head / Board / Executive Director]

From: [Name / Title]

Date: [Insert date]

Re: Request to attend the 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference

Request. I request approval to attend the 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference, August 19–20, 2026, in Tinley Park, Illinois, with estimated expenses of [\$___].

Business reason. This event is directly aligned with our work on recycling, waste reduction, circularity, public education, sustainability, materials management, stewardship, compliance readiness, and program implementation. Unlike a general conference, it is focused on Illinois conditions and convenes the agencies, local governments, recyclers, service providers, nonprofits, and industry partners whose decisions affect our work.

Expected benefits.

- Learn current Illinois-specific policy, program, and market information.
- Bring back practical ideas to improve recycling education, diversion, safety, operations, or reporting.
- Identify partnership opportunities and contacts for future problem-solving.
- Benchmark our programs against peer communities and organizations.
- Strengthen our ability to make defensible recommendations to leadership, boards, funders, or stakeholders.

Post-conference deliverables. Within 10 business days I will provide a written summary of takeaways, contacts, resources, and next steps, and identify at least three ideas that may benefit our organization.

Approved by: _____ Date: _____

10. Talking Points for Different Approvers

For a supervisor

- This is a working conference, not a passive networking event — I will return with written takeaways and concrete recommendations.
- The sessions address issues we already face: education, contamination, batteries, organics, textiles, producer responsibility, and future planning.
- The cost is small compared with uninformed program decisions, duplicative research, poor vendor choices, or preventable implementation mistakes.

For a board, council, or executive team

- Attendance supports better governance by grounding recommendations in current Illinois data, peer experience, and agency guidance.
- It helps us prepare for changes in stewardship, public education, materials management, and circular-economy policy.
- The investment produces usable information for budget planning, program design, and community communications.

For finance or purchasing

- The request is limited and documented, with a budget worksheet and post-event accountability plan.
- It reduces risk in future spending by improving our understanding of vendors, program models, markets, and implementation challenges.
- Costs can be controlled through early registration, member rates, shared travel, and approved-expense limits.

Our Sponsors

The 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference is made possible by the organizations below. Sponsorship opportunities remain across all tiers.

Presented by · Title Sponsor

The Battery Network



Hosted By:

Illinois Recycling Foundation



SWANA Illinois



Gold Sponsors



Silver Sponsors



Bronze Sponsors



Register & Contact

Ready to register, sponsor, or ask a question? Everything you need is here.

Participate

- Register: illinoisrecycles.org/Events
- Conference site: illinoiscircularityconference.org
- Full agenda: illinoiscircularityconference.org/agenda
- Become a sponsor or exhibitor: illinoiscircularityconference.org/sponsor
- Submit a proposal / abstract: still accepting panels, case studies, and technical talks.
- Hotel: reserve at the EVEN Hotel and ask for the conference rate.

Contact the Conference Team

Illinois Recycling Foundation

Email: info@illinoisrecycles.org

Phone: 708-847-7401

Web: illinoiscircularityconference.org • illinoisrecycles.org

Venue

EVEN Hotel & Tinley Park Convention Center 18451 Convention Center Drive, Tinley Park, IL 60477

We hope to see you in Tinley Park Join us August 19–20, 2026 to learn, connect, and help advance Illinois' circular economy.